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Viewing cable 03NASSAU766, BAHAMAS UNLIKELY TO PRESSURE ARISTIDE

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- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
03NASSAU766	2003-04-17 14:36	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Nassau

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-1/Campagne%20des%20E.U..asp>
<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-2/WikiLeaked%20Cables%20Reveal%20Obsessive.asp>
<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-2/Campagne%20des%20E.U..asp>

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NASSAU 000766

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/17/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [HA](#) [BF](#)

SUBJECT: BAHAMAS UNLIKELY TO PRESSURE ARISTIDE

Classified By: DCM Robert M. Witajewski, Reasons 1.5(b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) After returning from the OAS/CARICOM meeting on Haiti in Miami, Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell dismissed the possibility of invoking the democracy provision of the OAS Charter in the case of Haiti. He acknowledged problems with democracy in Haiti, but made it clear that the Bahamian government preferred continued engagement with President Aristide to any type of public confrontation. He also announced a decision to provide \$500,000 in economic assistance to Haiti, while admitting that it would not do much good if the political situation did not improve. Mitchell's main concern is doing whatever he can to slow down illegal immigration from Haiti - a key domestic political imperative - and he has been fruitlessly pursuing an immigration accord with the Government of Haiti for several months. A high official at the Foreign Ministry, although he proclaimed himself "not competent" to comment on Haiti's policy (or much of anything else), confirmed that Haiti believes it must stay engaged with the Aristide government to prevent a mass migration. End Summary.

Democracy in Crisis...

2. (U) Upon his return from Miami, Foreign Minister Mitchell discussed the situation there with the press. He admitted that the CARICOM Foreign Ministers were "frustrated with the situation in Haiti, and said that Aristide had put the international community "in a difficult position" by not living up to his commitments. He spoke frankly about Haiti's failure to: select an appropriate police commissioner, arrest an important fugitive involved in political violence, and plan for elections. While he placed some of the blame for

the lack of progress toward a political solution on the opposition, he acknowledged the government's greater share of blame and discussed the reasons why the opposition might feel threatened and unwilling to make concessions.

... But Need to Give Aristide Another Chance

13. (U) However, Mitchell went on to say that he thought it was "likely that the deadline will be extended," and Aristide should be given yet another chance to meet his commitments. He pointed out that The Bahamas, in his opinion has no choice: "We cannot afford to disengage from Haiti because disengaging for us is not an option." According to Mitchell, the issue of Haitian migrants and the potential for mass migration is the key issue for The Bahamas. Such a mass migration must be prevented at all costs, and Mitchell made it clear that he believed the best way to do that was continued engagement with the Aristide government in an attempt to improve Haiti's political and economic situation.

14. (U) Mitchell was dismissive of the possibility of invoking the democracy provisions of the OAS Charter, saying that although "Some people argue that's the case in Haiti ... I think that is taking it a little bit too far." He described the U.S. position on Haiti as "hard-minded", and called for continued dialogue. Mitchell also announced a \$500,000 economic assistance package for Haiti. In announcing it, he acknowledged that the assistance would likely not do much good unless the political impasse were resolved. Mitchell defended the package, however, by reiterating that the Government of the Bahamas must do whatever it can to improve the economic situation in Haiti because of the impact The Bahamas would likely feel if further economic and political crisis resulted in a mass migration. He made it very clear that this is the paramount issue for The Bahamas.

Who Is Competent Then?

15. (C) DCM and POL/ECON section chief raised the issue of Haiti with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Political Affairs Marco Rolle in an April 15 meeting requested by Rolle to go over the list of pending items between the Embassy and the MFA. Rolle, despite being the number three official at the Ministry of Embassy (he is the Bahamian equivalent of Undersecretary Grossman) and having accompanied Mitchell to both Miami and the press conference, told us that he "was not competent" to talk about Haiti policy with us. He couldn't even confirm any details about the aid package the Minister had announced in his presence. Nor could he comment on progress made toward an immigration accord with Haiti or the upcoming visit by Mitchell to Haiti in late March beyond confirming the dates (May 22-23). The one specific response we received to a question was whether or not Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell planned to make any trips or telephone calls to Haitian counterparts prior to the April 30 OAS meeting in Washington. The answer is: No.

Consistently Not Competent

16. (C) Inability to provide specific responses to queries was a consistent theme of our conversation with Rolle. Of the fifteen pending items on our agenda, he was unable to comment meaningfully on any single one of them, and could not point to MFA progress in resolving any of the issues which have been pending anywhere from 2-3 weeks (dip notes regarding a trade dispute, RBDF training and a proposal to form an anti-alien-smuggling task force) to 6 years (request for a bilateral work agreement). Rolle, a career civil servant with no background in foreign affairs, has only been with the ministry for about seven months, so it can be understood that he might not be familiar with every issue, but we would think he could do better than 0 for 15. The Bahamian civil service has honed sloth and delay disguised as deliberation and consensus-building to a fine art.

Comment

17. (C) We believe the bottom line for The Bahamas on Haiti is their fear of mass migration and doing anything that might trigger an outflow. Mitchell in particular has made conclusion of an immigration agreement his top foreign policy priority. Our sources in the Immigration Department tell us the negotiations are not going well, stalled over Haitian insistence on an amnesty for the 30,000 - 100,000 Haitians already in The Bahamas (most illegally). Such a concession would be suicide for Mitchell in the xenophobic Bahamian political landscape. Pursuit of this agreement and any other means to slow down migration will continue to push any concerns for democracy and human rights into the backseat. While The Bahamas will remain engaged on Haiti, the Christie government will resist any effort to put real teeth into any diplomatic effort to pressure President Aristide, preferring (endless) conversation and dialogue to the alternative.

BLANKENSHIP